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Testimony To Governor Scott Mc Callum Health Care Listening Session

September 23rd, 2003- La Crosse, WI

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La Crosse County Health Department

An important aspect in reducing and/or holding down the cost of health care is to assure that individuals have the best access possible to ways to prevent an illness from occurring in the first place. The State of Wisconsin through the Medical Assistance program needs to create incentives for health care practitioners and individuals insured by Medical Assistance to take advantage of ways to reducing illness. Incentives can also be built for the private sector to make similar incentives available for employees and others covered by private insurance.

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services should develop guidelines for target levels of services that should be expected within a region. These guidelines then would assist local health departments, health care practitioners and others to plan for an appropriate level of service.

In La Crosse County we are currently experiencing a significant reduction in the amount of Home Care services available. The amount of Home Care service per thousand persons is down almost 50% from the level of service that was provided several years ago. La Crosse County Government is seeking to assure the delivery of needed Home Care services. State guidance is needed on how many home health care visits we should have available to assure adequate services.

La Crosse County is also experiencing shortages of dental services. For example, private practitioners currently provide about 18,000 visits of care a year for persons covered by Medical Assistance but still there is a need for an additional 14,000 visits of care to individuals that have Medical Assistance insurance that have sought care, but are unable to receive it. Similar problems exist in family planning, mental health and other health services. Planning at the state level on target amounts of needed services compared with

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what is actually delivered would provide guidance locally which in turn would help assure appropriate use of existing resources.

The state of Wisconsin has published, “Healthiest Wisconsin 2010: A Partnership Plan to Improve the Health of the Public”. We, in the La Crosse area, have utilized this document and others to develop a local plan called, “Compass 2.0: Charting a Course for Our Future” to identify important concerns for improving health status in our area. Similar planning efforts in the past, have shown success with the establishment of the St. Claire Health Mission, creation of a dental clinic for low income persons and tobacco control activities among others. State of Wisconsin help is needed to assist in this effort to implement the Wisconsin plan through local initiatives.

The State of Wisconsin has established levy caps that prevent La Crosse County from providing important public health services. Failure of the state system to provide adequate reimbursement for Home Care is resulting in discussions that appear to mean that the County Health Department will no longer be able to provide needed levels of immunization, disease carrying mosquito control, head lice control, well and water testing programming, sexually transmitted disease follow up and a variety of important public health services. La Crosse County has had a long history of being among the lowest levy rate counties in the state and yet it is penalized as a result of this by having a low levy limit established. This levy cap needs to be evaluated to determine its impact on adversely effecting public health service delivery around the state.

The Wisconsin legislature has established a special study committee on bioterrorism at public health preparedness. There is no question that the state of Wisconsin utilizing federal funds will be able to establish an improved system for responding to public health emergencies. However, these funds appear to only be available for the next two years. It is important that the Wisconsin governor identify ways to assuring that emergency public health response capacity will continue after federal funds are reduced or come to an end.

Thank you for coming to La Crosse to gather input on improving the health status of Wisconsin citizens.